

Every two years a new Congress is sworn in and each time the air is filled with anticipation when freshmen lawmakers join our ranks. But last week's arrival of the much talked about 112th Congress felt more like a presidential inauguration.

The national media gave focus to the handover of political power in the House while droves of excited tourists and extended families of congressmen and congresswomen looked on.

There was something for everyone – pageantry, new political faces, symbolism and substance.

Last Wednesday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi officially turned over the gavel of her office to a new speaker – a man who worked several jobs in order to become the first in his family of 11 siblings to go to college. Republican Rep. John Boehner of Ohio – a former small businessman and 20-year veteran of the House – is our new speaker.

The newness of it all still permeates Capitol Hill, and Washington has the electric buzz of political transition even if the change is limited to the U.S. House of Representatives. The Senate and the White House remain under Democrat control.

While Speaker Pelosi was certainly a household name, Speaker Boehner is largely unknown to many Americans. On a personal note, the speaker's name (pronounced BAY-ner) is close enough in spelling to my own that many confused people – including members of the national news media – have contacted my office attempting to reach the gentleman from Ohio.

After choosing a new speaker, lawmakers elected to the 112th Congress were sworn in en masse amidst a crowded House chamber. Alabama also made history last week when two women officially joined our Congressional delegation, each representing a different political party. Democrat Rep. Terri Sewell of Birmingham – a native of Selma – is our state's first African-American congresswoman, while Rep. Martha Roby of Montgomery is Alabama's first female Republican congresswoman.

North Alabama's Fifth Congressional District saw its first elected Republican congressman since reconstruction as Rep. Mo Brooks of Huntsville was also sworn in.

Constitution Shares Spotlight:

On the second day of the 112th Congress, Speaker Boehner honored his pledge to initiate the House's proceedings with a reading of the Constitution. To the surprise of many, last Thursday was the first time in the history of the U.S. House going back 221 years that the Constitution was read aloud before lawmakers.

By reading the Constitution, the new speaker and conservative Congress sought to underscore their pledge to subject all legislation to our founders' principles of a fully accountable and limited federal government.

A bipartisan group of approximately 130 lawmakers, including myself, took turns reading the Constitution on the House floor.

Getting Down to Business:

The American people are dead serious about putting Washington on a spending diet and the new Congress has received this message loud and clear. Policies promoting bigger government and unsustainable deficit spending have been shelved with the departure of Speaker Pelosi.

After fulfilling our pledge to begin the 112th Congress with the reading of the Constitution, the House followed up on another promise, cutting our own operating budget by five percent. Admittedly, a five percent reduction in Congress's budget is only a small step, but it sets in motion the House's plan to place all federal spending under a microscope – rolling back the overall federal budget to fiscal year 2008 levels by eliminating wasteful, duplicative and outdated programs.

Last year, the Democrat-controlled House failed to pass a budget, and, instead, temporarily funded the government through this March. Speaker Boehner has promised to lower federal spending this year to pre-stimulus levels while also beginning the process of reducing the size

of government.

The new House has also begun to fulfill its promise to prohibit all Congressional "earmarks". No more bridges to nowhere.

Admittedly, the taxpayer savings from ending earmarks is rather small – about one percent of the overall federal budget – but the impact is significant in terms of demonstrating lawmakers' resolve in tackling the budget crisis.

For sure, the 112th Congress has a very steep hill to climb in order to restore public confidence in Washington. Nevertheless, the new Congress comes to town with a level of energy and enthusiasm not seen since the late 1990's when conservatives forced the White House to make real progress towards a balanced budget. Unlike then, today Republicans don't also control the Senate. But with public support, lawmakers can still have a positive impact for change.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.